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SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL RESILIENCE ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE
(SERAL)

WHAT IS SERAL?

The Social and Ecological Resilience Across the Landscape (SERAL) Project is a unique large landscape project developed by the Yosemite Stanislaus Solution (YSS) collaborative group in collaboration with the Stanislaus National Forest using new landscape condition assessment metrics and cutting-edge scenario planning tools. SERAL was created as an alternative plan to the former Moving Toward Resiliency within the Mokelumne to Kings Landscape (MOTOR M2K) Project.

MOTOR M2K was originally proposed as a two-forest effort spanning the Stanislaus and Sierra National Forests and three different collaborative areas (YSS, ACCG, and Dinkey Creek). The three collaboratives collectively agreed that MOTOR M2K created too high levels of controversy and was unlikely to gain broad consensus support from stakeholder interests among the groups. These collaborative groups solicited a meeting with Region 5 leadership (Barnie Gyant – Deputy Regional Forester) to share their desire to plan a less polarizing, less controversial, large landscape plan approach to increasing the pace and scale of project planning and treatment implementation.

The meeting with Barnie Gyant was held on October 21, 2019 and was well attended by representatives of each collaborative group, as well as STF and SNF staff.

The result of the October 2019 meeting was as follows:

- Barnie agreed to end the MOTOR M2K plan, but in return he specifically asked the collaboratives to move past opposing that plan, and to now respond back to him with where their stakeholder group would like to plan a large landscape project and to spell out what forest treatment actions they would support within those areas. Each collaborative was asked to develop their proposal and submit a response to Barnie.
- Barnie also communicated to the two Forests that they were tasked with working with the collaboratives and to plan and develop the stakeholder proposals that would be submitted from each group. This would require unique interaction and engagement between the Forest and the collaborative group during project development to ensure the forest was accurately attempting to incorporate where feasible the design and desires of the collaborative groups.

YSS, ACCG, and Dinkey all submitted responses to Barnie's request. To date, YSS, is the only collaborative that brought forward a proposed project area, proposed treatments, funding, and a proposed planning scheme that was ready for development¹. An added benefit to YSS's proposal was their involvement and participation in an

¹ Conversely, in November of 2019, ACCG committed to collaborate with the Calaveras Ranger District on the Stanislaus National Forest and the Amador Ranger District on the Eldorado National Forest to identify priority areas and approaches that represent the least controversial ways to increase pace and scale for the successful implementation of large treatments

existing MSA between YSS, STF and Tuolumne County. Originally the YSS proposal was referred to as the “Bridge Project”. Through the collaborative efforts of the STF ID Team, STF Leadership and the YSS Leadership team, the initial YSS Bridge Project transformed into what is now the SERAL project. When there have been questions as to whether the Forest staff has accurately incorporated the intent of the YSS stakeholder group in the plan that they attempted to design (in response to Barnie’s request), the Forest has reached out to the YSS Leadership Team for clarification and feedback. A brief high-level explanation of the complexities tied to the ForSys modeling planning process was also provided to the Leadership Team since the stakeholder group was unclear as to why the large landscape planning process was taking so long to complete.

WHAT PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT HAS OCCURRED TO DATE?

As described above, YSS leadership was instrumental in the initial development of the proposed action which was circulated for a 30-day public comment period from July 16, 2020 through August 17, 2020.

A virtual public meeting was hosted on August 5, 2020. During the meeting the SERAL ID Team presented an overview of the proposed actions and answered questions.

- Twenty-two (22) individual unique comment letters were received during this initial public comment period.
- Approximately 250 specific written comments were identified among the letters which could be grouped into 128 different concerns (many similar).

The SERAL ID Team used the comments and concerns presented in the 22 comment letters to refine the project purpose and need, identify significant issues, identify additional alternatives to consider in detail, and to prepare a focused analysis to address the significant issues in the Draft EIS.

Broadly the issues identified are related to forest thinning and the removal of trees in California spotted owl PACs; the inclusion of DBH limits; the ability of the project to provide wood products; the proposed project specific forest plan amendments and the need to amend the plan (including for example, converting to territories from HRCAs and PAC retirement based on lack of occupancy); herbicide use to treat non-native invasive plants; and potential impacts to the characteristics of eligible Wild and Scenic river segments.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATUS OF SERAL?

Alternative Development

Four alternatives are being developed and will be considered in detail, one of which is the no action alternative. While the concept and written description of the alternatives are completed, identifying specific sites where the proposed treatments will occur is still under active development.

Alternative 1 – the modified proposed action, is being developed to meet the purpose and needs of the project in collaboration with Yosemite Stanislaus Solution collaborative group. Actions proposed in Alternative 1 include forest thinning, understory and surface fuel reduction, prescribed fire, shaded fuelbreak maintenance and construction, hazard tree abatement, invasive weed control and eradication, and project specific forest plan amendments developed to apply the management approaches and conservation measures presented in the 2019 Conservation Strategy for the California Spotted Owl in the Sierra Nevada. Application of the CSO Strategy is only included in Alternative 1 and made possible by the suite of project-specific forest plan amendments.

within the ACCG’s boundaries. Similarly, Dinkey Collaborative presented a proposed “process to identify emphasis areas and actions”.

Alternative 2 is the no action alternative as required by 40 CFR 1502.14(c). No management activities will occur. The no action alternative provides the baseline for assessing the comparative impacts of the action alternatives (Alternatives 1, 3, and 4).

Alternative 3 will represent a version of Alternative 1 (the modified proposed action) developed in compliance with current management direction as written in the Stanislaus National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. Alternative 3 does not include any project-specific forest plan amendments or adopt the management approaches or conservations measures presented in the 2019 CSO Strategy.

Alternative 4 will represent an alternative which was developed to comprehensively address comments and concerns not already addressed in refinements to Alternative 1 or by Alternative 3. Like Alternative 3, Alternative 4 has been developed under the direction of the current Stanislaus National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and does not adopt the CSO Strategy or include project-specific forest plan amendments. Unlike the other action alternatives, however, Alternative 4 does not include mechanical treatment within PACs, the salvage of drought, insect, disease, or fire killed trees, hazard tree abatement, temporary road construction, or herbicide use for the control and eradication of non-native invasive weeds.

Landscape Condition Metrics and Application of ForSys

The SERAL ID team has developed a process in which the suite of landscape condition metrics being developed for SERAL will be used as ForSys scenario inputs, including applying thresholds and constraints, to identify where treatments would be most effective in meeting SERAL project objectives.

The SERAL ID Team is currently waiting for the delivery of an updated – and hopefully final – version of the ForSys input shapefile. Some key metrics included in the shapefile are being reprocessed by the Remote Sensing Lab (RSL) F3 team to correct some coding nuances discovered during project development.

The final product will include both existing condition information and modeled estimates of post-treatment results for key metrics for each of the action alternatives. The post-treatment modeled metrics will be used to conduct the analysis of effects and the comparative trade-offs among the action alternatives.

Treatment Area Selection

Once the Forest interdisciplinary team receives the updated ForSys input shapefile, the SERAL team will complete the processes to identify where and what treatments are being proposed for each action alternative.

DEIS Focused Analysis

The DEIS will present a focused analysis addressing: (1) issues related to the alternatives; and (2) the ability of the alternatives to meet the purpose and needs of the project (effectiveness of the proposed actions). The outline of the analysis section has been developed, including the affected environment and indicators and measures.

The calculations of the indicators and measures and the narrative of direct, indirect, and cumulative effects will begin as soon as treatment area selection is completed and alternatives are finalized.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT PROJECT TIMELINE?

Due to the unique nature of SERAL, new data development, new modeling efforts, and the first-time application of ForSys to support project planning, delays have occurred. The SERAL ID Team and STF Forest are anxious to publish the DEIS and share the culmination of this multi-year effort and the results of our collaborative planning effort with YSS.

The end is in sight. We believe we will be able to publish a DEIS and initiate a 45-day opportunity to comment on the DEIS in November of this year (2021).

Date	Key Stage
End of September	Complete Alternative Development
End of October	Complete DEIS Analysis
Mid- to Late-November	Publish DEIS NOA in Federal Register Initiate 45-day Opportunity to Comment
Early December	Host Virtual Public Meeting to Discuss the Contents of the DEIS